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ABSTRACT

Noting that schools have long neglected the verbally talented student, this booklet is designed to stimulate educators first to identify such students and then to develop programs that will meet their needs. The first section of the booklet reviews a number of models that have been used to identify students gifted in reading, writing, foreign languages, and other curriculum areas. The second section discusses the Johns Hopkins Program for Verbally Gifted Youth, emphasizing its writing and etymologies components. The third section provides guidelines for implementing programs for the verbally gifted, including student selection criteria, teacher qualifications, and administrative roles. The fourth section sets forth criteria for selecting teachers for the program and lists the characteristics that are desirable in such teachers. The final section of the booklet stresses the need for long-range planning and guidance for students in gifted programs. Appendixes contain lists of achievement tests that may be used to identify gifted students, names and addresses of people involved in Talent Search, and tests for use in identifying verbal talents, as well as a teacher checklist for creative writing. (FL)

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Educating Verbally Gifted Youth

By Lynn H. Fox
and
William G. Durden

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Verbal Talent: A National Resource

Almost daily the popular media as well as professional journals indict U.S. schools and the culture in general for the neglect of verbal competencies. Headlines proclaim the decline in reading ability and SAT verbal scores; the rate of functional illiteracy in high school seniors has been estimated at over 10% and sometimes as high as 20%. Businesses decry the inability of their employees to write a coherent memo; teachers criticize their students' linguistic incompetence; and journalists, in turn, mock teachers' writing deficiencies.

The situation with respect to another area of verbal competency, foreign languages, became so acute that former President Jimmy Carter commissioned a blue-ribbon panel in 1978 to assess America's commitment to foreign language and international studies. The results of the panel's study portray the bleakest of educational scenarios. Just a few findings from the report suffice to indicate the critical nature of foreign language study in America. Only one of 20 public high school students studies French, German, or Russian beyond the second year. (Four years is considered a minimum for basic fluency.) Only 8% of American colleges and universities now require a foreign language for admission, compared to 34% in 1966. It is estimated that there are 10,000 English-speaking Japanese business representatives on assignment in the U.S. but fewer than 900 American counterparts in Japan, and only a handful of them have a working knowledge of the Japanese language. U.S. foreign affairs agencies are deeply concerned that declining foreign language enrollment in our schools and colleges

will result in low quality recruits requiring extensive and expensive language training, the costs of which were already at a level of $100 million in 1978. In a recently published study of school children's knowledge and perception of other nations and peoples, over 40% of the twelfth-graders could not locate Egypt correctly, while over 20% were equally ignorant of the whereabouts of France or China.

Former Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas points out the deleterious effects on America's role in international affairs when he states, "Our linguistic and cultural myopia and the casualness with which we take cognizance—when we do—of the developed tastes, mannerisms, mores, and languages of other countries, are losing us friends, business, and respect in the world" (*Newsweek*, 30 July 1979).

In addition to our failure to maintain a strong verbal culture in general, it is equally discomforting that many of our most promising verbally gifted youth—those most likely to be our future leaders—remain unchallenged in our schools. Complaints are heard regularly from these students and their parents as well as from concerned teachers about the slow pace and repetitious nature of foreign language instruction; the lack of regular writing practice; the scarcity of critical commentary on the minimal writing that is done; and the neglect of such subjects as Latin, Greek, English and world literature, and modern foreign languages that provide talented students a cultural and literary context for dealing with intellectual issues. Many verbally talented youngsters are simply unversed in the content and structures of our linguistic tradition.

There are many reasons for this neglect of the verbally gifted. First, there is considerable uncertainty about what verbal giftedness is. It is not easy to define. Many would argue that there is a pervasive anti-intellectualism in U.S. culture that has little patience for knowledge that does not yield immediate and practical results (in this context, mathematical or scientific giftedness is more readily tolerated). One also hears appeals of anti-elitism that summarily dismiss the special needs of the verbally gifted, reflected in such statements as "The 'brains' will make it in life anyway, so why provide them special programs." This assumption continues to be made, despite research that confirms the special needs of gifted students, as reflected in their drop-

out, delinquency, and suicide rates (see, for example, Lajoie and Shore, 1981).

It is the authors' firm belief that equity of treatment is needed for gifted youth at least as much as for other special student populations, because verbal talent is a national resource, the nurture of which is vital to society. Defined, in part, as the ability to reason with precision and to think imaginatively, verbal talent can be applied to almost every form of communication and is essential to many professions. Popular conceptions to the contrary, even scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and business persons require verbal talent. The scientist's research must be explained in clear and precise language if it is to be communicated to a wider audience. Some American businesses now are deliberately recruiting prospective employees who combine business training with a strong background in the liberal arts—a curriculum that has traditionally emphasized verbal ability. For example, Roger B. Smith, chairman and chief executive officer of General Motors, in a recent speech before the Commercial Club of Chicago outlined his company's decision to recruit systematically the best liberal arts majors at the best liberal arts colleges. He said business leadership today requires a broad range of talent and interests to meet the needs of both consumers and society. That requirement, General Motors believes, can be met with the verbally fluent liberal arts students.

However, the identification, definition, and nurturing of verbal talent has proven far more troublesome than that of some other types of giftedness. Verbal talent, by its very nature, resists precise definition. Unlike mathematical talent, which some educators—albeit unfairly—define narrowly as skill in solving spatial and quantitative problems, defining verbal talent evokes such seemingly intangible qualities as insight, inspiration, and creativity. Much like the concept of creativity, verbal talent is viewed by some as a personal attribute and by others as an intellectual process.

While developing an all-encompassing definition of verbal ability is a worthy pursuit, the lack of a comprehensive definition should not deter educators from fostering verbal talent in ways that can be readily measured. For example, general verbal reasoning ability and reading comprehension are important ingredients of verbal talent. To identify

and develop these abilities in students is a matter of national concern. To communicate well, to avoid ambiguity, and to comprehend thoroughly are essential to the intellectual and cultural integrity of the nation. The charge to educators is clear.

It is the authors' hope that this fastback will be helpful in stimulating educators first to identify verbally talented youth and then to develop programs that will nurture that talent. The payoff will be reflected in enriched and purposeful lives for the students themselves and in the quality of life in our society.

Searching for Verbal Talent: The Models

In 1971 the U.S. Office of Education introduced a definition of gifted and talented children that has become the model for most state and local school systems (Marland, 1972). It reads as follows:

> Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding activities are capable of high performance. These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those normally provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.
>
> Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following categories,* singly or in combination.
>
> 1. general intellectual ability
> 2. specific academic aptitude
> 3. creativity and productive thinking
> 4. leadership ability
> 5. visual and performing arts

The five categories are not mutually exclusive. Verbal talent is probably related to all five categories but most specifically to the first two. Efforts to identify and provide programming for verbally gifted students have typically concentrated on one or more of four areas: verbal reasoning, reading, foreign languages, and creative writing. Verbal reasoning ability is clearly related to general intellectual ability on such tests as the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised

*The initial definition included a sixth category of psychomotor giftedness, which was dropped in later legislation.

(WISC-R) or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Such tests measure the depth and breadth of vocabulary and the ability to see relationships between and among words. Such reasoning ability is, of course, related to academic achievement in subjects other than language arts, such as biology or history.

Students who exhibit aptitude for reading or learning foreign languages would fall under category two of the U.S. Office of Education definition of giftedness—specific academic aptitude. Such students can be identified on measures of aptitude and/or achievement. The highly able reader is often described as a child who scores two years above grade level on a standardized reading achievement test.

The fourth type of verbal giftedness, creative writing aptitude, is more difficult to identify and categorize. Since creative writing is not a standard curriculum offering and since it cannot be assessed by customary standardized achievement or aptitude measures, it is often excluded from the category of specific academic aptitude. Creative writing ability is sometimes considered as a subcategory in the creative and productive thinking category.

It is difficult to estimate how many students are verbally gifted. Since the concept of verbal giftedness can be broadly defined as more than one type of specific academic aptitude, it seems logical to assume that it would encompass more children than other types of giftedness. For example, mathematically gifted students are often defined as those children or youth who score in the upper 3% to 5% of their age/grade cohorts on measures of mathematical reasoning. To define verbally gifted youths as those who score in the upper 3% to 5% of their age/grade cohorts on a measure of verbal reasoning, however, is probably too conservative, since verbal talent includes a broader spectrum of content and skills.

The typical definition of highly able reader, as one who reads two years or more above grade level, would include about 3% of the age/grade population. However, while reading and general verbal reasoning are related, not all highly able readers would score in the upper 5% on a verbal measure. Conversely, some students who score at or above 125 on the verbal portion of the WISC-R do not read two years or more above grade level, which suggests that verbal reasoning, as meas-

ured by some tests, is independent of reading achievement. Some students who are very imaginative might be identified as potential creative writers but not qualify as gifted on measures of verbal reasoning or reading achievement. Thus, the percent of the population who might be identified as verbally gifted would depend on the types of measures of verbal ability that were used. A conservative estimate would be 5% of the population. It is reasonable, however, that one out of every 10 school-age children is in need of a differentiated program of instruction in one or more subject areas in which reading, expressive language, or general verbal reasoning plays a major role.

There are two basic strategies for identifying the verbally gifted. The first is to seek out the most highly gifted students—those who are so precocious in their verbal development that they would be identified in at least two of the four, and possibly three or all four, of the categories of verbal talent described above. They would score in the upper 3% of their age group on a measure of verbal reasoning, be highly able readers, and perhaps possess strong aptitude for foreign languages and creative or expository writing. This strategy seeks to identify students whose needs cannot be met readily in the regular class.

The second strategy for identification of verbally gifted concentrates on a larger but less precocious group of students who could benefit from special facilitation or modest adjustment of their educational program in one or more curriculum areas related to verbal ability. This second strategy might be viewed as a diagnostic-prescriptive approach to verbal talent in three of the specific areas of verbal ability. Such an approach could conceivably lead to greater individualization within regular classes as well as provision for special programming at the elementary or secondary level.

The rationale and mechanics for applying these two strategies are described in the following sections.

The Highly Verbally Gifted

A model for identifying the mathematically precocious child was developed at Johns Hopkins University by Julian C. Stanley and his associates in 1971. That model has now been expanded for identifying those youths who are extremely advanced in terms of verbal reasoning

ability as measured by different tests. Each year a Talent Search is conducted for the Johns Hopkins Program for Verbally Gifted Youth (PVGY). The search is for seventh-graders, who must have scored at or above the 97th percentile on the verbal, numerical, or total score of an in-grade achievement test such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (see Appendix A for a list of possible achievement tests). Students then take the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in a regular testing center and also the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE) at the same time.

Students who score 430 or higher on the verbal portion of the SAT at grade seven (430 is the mean score for high school seniors) are considered verbally precocious. A score of 35 or above is also required on the TSWE to qualify for Hopkins's special yearlong Saturday programs in German, Writing, Etymology, and Latin. Details of these programs are provided in a later chapter. In brief, students who have these high scores at grade seven can readily master college-level coursework.

The Talent Search at Johns Hopkins is open to students in Maryland, District of Columbia, Delaware, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Supplemental searches in 1981-82 include New York and the New England states. A parallel Talent Search is conducted by Duke University for students in North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, Iowa, Florida, Georgia, Texas, Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Oklahoma. Another Talent Search is conducted by Arizona State University for students in Arizona, Washington, and parts of California. Illinois and Minnesota State Departments of Education conduct similar searches in selected local school systems in their states. Persons to contact about applying for these searches are found in Appendix B.

Although the SAT has been the primary test used in the talent searches, there are equivalent tests that can be administered directly by schools, such as the School and College Ability Test (SCAT), or the Differential Aptitude Test (DAT). Information about various tests for different age groups is provided in Appendix C. What is important is that aptitude tests designed for much older students be used with younger students in order to find those who are verbally precocious and

in need of a differentiated program. For example, fourth-, fifth- and sixth-graders can be tested on the Academic Promise Test (APT) designed for sixth- through ninth-graders. This test measures both verbal reasoning and language usage.

Verbally gifted youth, who are identified on the basis of verbal reasoning ability, will vary from one another in terms of their interests. Some are eager to develop their writing skills; some want to learn foreign languages; some are interested in the etymology of the English language; and others want a course in classical Greek or Latin. PVGY students self-select these specific courses since they all seem to possess the skills for mastering any of them. The programs at Johns Hopkins and Duke hope to expand course offerings to include Chinese and advanced courses in the social sciences and history.

The Highly Able Reader

Typically, the highly able reader is defined as a student capable of reading two or more years above grade level. The usual approach is to test students on a standardized reading test. While this is time efficient, there are several problems with this approach. A third-grader who scores at the fifth-grade level on a standardized test is not necessarily capable of reading fifth-grade material. Rather, the score reflects the child's position relative to other third-graders, meaning the child scored better than 95% of third-graders who took the test. A more precise method of identifying highly able readers is to have the reading specialist administer an Informal Reading Inventory (IRI) to determine the level at which the child can read independently, the instructional level, and the level at which the child comprehends spoken language. This information can be used to make appropriate adjustments to the child's reading programs. Unfortunately, schools usually do not have enough reading specialists to allow for careful diagnostic testing of every child.

Perhaps the most practical solution to locating the gifted reader is to search existing test records for students who score in the upper 10% on a standardized reading test and those who score 115 or higher on a group intelligence test. These students should then receive a careful evaluation by a specialist. Checking with parents and librarians to find students who are reading books that are at an advanced level outside of

school is another good technique. Ideally, all students entering the first grade should be screened to determine whether they are already reading.

The Creative Writer

Creative writing requires a good imagination, a wealth of ideas, and the ability to express those ideas in a form that others can appreciate. Basic mechanics of punctuation and grammar can be learned by most students, but finding the potentially gifted writer requires identifying those who show signs of great imagination. A frequently recommended procedure for identifying the creative writer is to have students submit their essays, poems, or short stories for review by a panel of experts. However, this procedure tends to overlook students who have talent but who are too shy to share their written work or who simply never have been encouraged to write.

Some experts in education of the gifted would advocate other methods to locate such children. The Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking is one instrument that has been used to identify students who are very imaginative. Teacher checklists have also been developed. A sample checklist for creative writing is included in Appendix D. Abraham Tannenbaum at Teachers College, Columbia University suggests that teachers provide creative writing opportunities for all children but single out those who benefit most from these experiences and whose talents could be nurtured by additional help and encouragement. The Enrichment Triad Model developed by Joseph Renzulli at the University of Connecticut could be used to provide all children with opportunities to improve their communication skills, while allowing the more creative students to pursue their own projects in depth, sometimes with the aid of a community mentor.

Aptitude for Foreign Languages

While there are some standardized tests of readiness for instruction in foreign languages, there is no research as to their usefulness for identifying students who have a real facility for learning other languages, especially at an early age. A listing of tests that might be used is in Appendix C. The criteria for identifying junior high school-age students who are capable of college-level coursework in German at

Johns Hopkins are verbal reasoning scores of 430 or above on the SAT-V and scores of 35 or more on the TSWE. Other tests could be substituted for these two, as long as they provide norms for comparisons with older students.

At the elementary level, it may be appropriate to offer all children an opportunity to learn another language in the oral/conversational mode as early as kindergarten. Then through a process of self-selection, those who have the talent and interest could move forward to more formal instruction in the language.

Verbal Talents Across the Curriculum

Even though verbal giftedness is usually associated with the language arts, teachers of every subject area should be encouraged to look for students who exhibit verbal facility in their particular area. It is possible that a youth might not be interested in reading fiction and do poorly on conventional reading tests, yet be able to read technical articles in biology or sophisticated historical records with understanding and insight. Clarity of thought and expression should be prized and rewarded in every area of the curriculum.

A Model Program: The Johns Hopkins Program for Verbally Gifted Youth

The Johns Hopkins Program for Verbally Gifted Youth (PVGY) provides one model for educating verbally gifted youth. PVGY is an outgrowth of the now internationally known Study of Mathematically Precocious Youth (SMPY), which officially began at Johns Hopkins University in September 1971, under the direction of Julian C. Stanley. SMPY seeks, in part, to accelerate the mathematical development of talented youth.

Also in 1971, a program for verbally talented youngsters, known as the Study of Verbally Gifted Youth (see McGinn, 1976), was founded by Robert Hogan. This study was designed to identify talented young people who, as adults, would make significant contributions to the improvement of society. The study also sought to learn more about the nature of verbal giftedness and to develop methods of facilitating the education of such students.

The first Verbal Talent Search attracted 287 seventh- and eighth-graders. They had SAT-Verbal (SAT-V) scores equivalent to those of high school juniors; 65 students with SAT-V scores ≥ 570 completed additional tests of verbal ability, creativity, and social insight, earning scores similar to those of college students. Personality tests indicated that the students were socially mature and possessed a number of traits conducive to achievement, although the descriptions of boys and girls in the sample differed in a number of respects. For example, tests suggested that the boys were mildly withdrawn or introverted and also analytical, rational, theoretical, and pragmatically oriented; girls,

however, seemed to be imaginative, intuitive, and interpersonally oriented. Among the high SAT-V students, 31 participated in either creative writing or introductory social science in a college-level summer enrichment program. Student achievement in the program was used as a measure of the adequacy of the identification techniques (McGinn, 1976).

While the study lasted five years and was productive in several ways (e.g., psychometric approaches have some use in identifying verbal talent; tests designed for older persons can be used successfully with a very bright but younger group; the very brightest junior high school students are capable of performing well above their grade level), achievement of at least two of the program's goals remained incomplete: 1) to identify talented youth who as adults will contribute to the improvement of society, and 2) to learn more about the nature of verbal giftedness.

Julian C. Stanley remained intrigued with verbal giftedness and sought a more concrete approach than that used in the Study of Verbally Gifted Youth; namely, to educate students in the sophisticated dimensions of language and to develop precision and accuracy in their writing. In the fall of 1978, when a number of academic departments at Johns Hopkins University expressed an interest in facilitating the education of verbally talented youngsters, the Program for Verbally Gifted Youth was founded on an experimental, Saturday-class basis. It has since developed into a major project with an academic-year commuter program, a summer commuter program, and a three-week summer residential program.

Three departments at Johns Hopkins participated in the formation of PVGY—The Writing Seminars, Classics, and German. The primary purposes of the program are to provide verbally gifted youth of junior high school age academic challenges comparable to those already being offered to scientifically and mathematically gifted youth and to give youngsters a humanities curriculum qualitatively differentiated from that normally available in the junior high-high school experience. PVGY does not attempt to teach creativity as a distinctive program objective. Imagination and individualized thought are indeed encouraged through instructional techniques and through interaction

with talented, knowledgeable teachers and other students; but PVGY's goals are practical and subject-oriented. High academic achievement is demanded of each participant.

The educational philosophy of PVGY starts with two premises: 1) Verbal reasoning ability can be guided from an early age by a disciplined and systematic exposure to the basic tools of written communication. "Basic" here is not to be equated with that which is simple but rather with that which is fundamental to understanding and using language as a powerful and sophisticated communicative tool. 2) PVGY views the English language not as an insular subject but as a complex of related disciplines, all combining to inform the student of the tradition, limitations, and possibilities of the discipline.

PVGY offers students an environment that stimulates all varieties of verbal talent by providing a solid foundation in the sophisticated mechanics of the English language; by familiarizing students with a linguistic tradition through the study of etymology and foreign languages; by improving writing skills; and by allowing qualified young students access to college-level work. PVGY expects each student to complete successfully the academic requirements of each course (quizzes, tests, and designated homework) and to perform well on college entrance testing when administered at the appropriate time. In addition, PVGY hopes that the coursework fosters in students an appreciation of the humanities and a love for the art of written expression, goals that cannot be immediately evaluated but will be manifested in the future activities of participants.

The Johns Hopkins Talent Search, administered by the university's Office of Talent Identification and Development (OTID), identifies those students who will participate in PVGY. They must demonstrate exceptional verbal ability on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), as well as high performance on the Test of Standard Written English (TSWE). These tests are taken during a student's seventh-grade year. A score of $\geq$ 430 SAT-V and $\geq$ 35 TSWE qualifies a student for the academic-year and summer commuter programs; 500 SAT-V and 40 TSWE is needed for entrance to the summer residential program. The age range of those who are accepted is from 11 to 13.

Courses offered by PVGY are equivalent to regular courses at Johns

Hopkins University and are taught by individuals who have subject-matter expertise—Ph.D.'s, Ph.D. candidates, or published writers—and, in most cases, have had teaching experience at the precollege level. Class size is restricted to a maximum of 15. The instructional mode varies from traditional lecture style to workshop approaches. The workshop approach has been particularly effective in the course Writing Skills I, which is discussed in the next section.

As of the summer of 1981, PVGY offered seven courses: Writing Skills I, Writing Skills II, German for Beginners, Advanced German, Latin I, Latin II, and Etymologies. Each course is equivalent to an academic-year program. In the fall of 1981, two new courses were introduced: Modern Chinese and Critical Readings. Since Writing Skills I and Etymologies are critical disciplines in the PVGY program, they deserve fuller description.

Writing Skills I*

Writing Skills (WS) is equivalent to the Johns Hopkins Writing Seminars course Contemporary American Letters, a required course for all underclassmen for admission to advanced work in writing. However, the course has been modified somewhat to accommodate the distinctive style of verbally gifted youth.

Writing Skills assumes that students have important information to express and helps them investigate the means by which ideas are communicated. WS provides tools for verbally gifted children; it facilitates students' precocious interest in a specific area and moves them through the subject at a more accelerated rate than is normally possible at the secondary school level. Thus, the goal of WS is to develop in students an accurate and imaginative expository style aiming for effective, analytic writing based on a familiarity with the semantic, structural, and rhetorical resources of the English language.

The instructional approach is the workshop method. In PVGY a workshop is a small-group learning experience—no more than 15, no fewer than six, and an optimum of 10 students. The small group is es-

*This description of the Writing Skills course is adapted from "Teaching Writing Skills to Verbally Gifted Youngsters," by Ben Reynolds, in *G/C/T*, Fall 1980. Reynolds is a member of the PVGY staff.

sential for the problem-posing approach used. Too large a group leaves out the quieter and more methodical students. A large group is also likely to have more discipline problems.

The key element in the workshop approach is each student's written text. At least one student essay must be in the hands of each student each session. "Workshopping" a text can take various forms depending on the posture of the individual instructors. Ben Reynolds believes that the essential question (stated or implied) is "How could you (the writer) make this idea clearer?" While the writer of the essay remains silent, the group dissects the composition, working backward from the importance of the content to the sharpening of techniques that make the content clear. For instance, would the essay work better if written like George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant," from the abstract to the specific, or would the use of metaphors make a description clearer? In addition, students are exposed to persuasion, argument, narration, description, diction, voice, analogy, conceit, and syntax.

Kendra Kopelke, another WS instructor, divides a class into three groups (excluding the author of the paper under discussion). Each group has a specific function in the workshop: Narrative Specialists, Mechanical Engineers, and Content Consultants. Students in each group are responsible for their area of specialization. Initially, the students point out their favorite thing about the essay under discussion—a word, a sentence, an idea, a technique (Kopelke calls this the "opening celebration"). Then begins a predominately negative critique of the text by each of the three groups. The author may not respond to the criticism until the end of the process and at that time may address merely one point.

In practice, problem-posing can be interrupted with short didactic expositions drawn from the instructor's wider experience in writing. Discussing simile and analogy, metaphor and conceit, an instructor might refer to Tom Robbins, James Thurber, S. J. Perelman, or John Donne. To reinforce exemplary applications of writing techniques, students analyze both outstanding and questionable performances of established writers.

Essential to the "workshopping" of an essay are the processes of re-

writing and editing. Students linger over their writing samples, continuously reformulating until they produce something that "works." This procedure is aided by extensive critical commentary on the papers by the WS instructors. The principal texts used in the course are *Writing Well* by Donald Hall and *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk, Jr. and E. B. White.

Student essays are graded by the instructors on a 1 to 10 scale, with 5 as an average performance. The grade is measured against each student's individual performance, not in relation to the group. Students may have only average grades in PVGY, but would rank at the top of the class in their regular school. Grades are based on individual performance because, though problem-posing is a group activity, writing is not.

Etymologies

Etymologies is equivalent to a full-year course—Latin and Greek in Current Use—offered at Johns Hopkins University. The course is designed to acquaint students with Latin or Greek contributions to the English vocabulary. The text used is *English Words from Latin and Greek Elements* by Donald M. Ayers. In addition to the study of Greek and Latin stems or bases and affixes, Etymologies attempts to help students to become familiar with the history of the Indo-European language, to appreciate how language is structured as a linguistic system, and to become acquainted through independent research with significant personages in the scholarly study of the English language.

General topics treated in the course are word elements from Latin and Greek: Latin bases, prefixes; uncommon usage of words; Latin words and phrases in English; words from Greek mythology, history, and philosophy; Greek bases, prefixes, suffixes; sea terms; words from sports and games; military terms; words from the arts and law; scientific language; and combining forms used in medical terms. At the conclusion of the course, students are given an examination equivalent to one administered to regular Johns Hopkins students.

Evaluation methods in all PVGY coursework include classroom quizzes and tests. Students in second-level coursework (excepting Etymologies and Modern Chinese) are given both appropriate College

Board Achievement Tests and College Board Advanced Placement Tests. The achievement tests measure mastery of a subject after the equivalent of the regular four-year high school program. A sufficiently high score on Advanced Placement Tests permits students to receive college credit from most U.S. colleges and universities. PVGY students have achieved well on advanced placement examinations taken at an early age. Of the 21 students taking examinations in either German Language and Composition or English Language and Composition, 16 (or 76%) received scores of 3 or higher (1 is the minimum score, 5 is the maximum score), thus qualifying them for credit at many colleges and universities.

PVGY students do not receive traditional letter or numerical final grades. During the first year of the program, a conventional grading system was attempted, but it was soon found that local school officials did not seem impressed if the grade was less than "A." They frequently ignored the fact that a "B" or "C" for a PVGY course was based on college standards and not on junior high or high school criteria. At present, a written evaluation is mailed to each student, with the recommendation that he/she bring this letter to a staff member sympathetic to gifted education so that appropriate in-school placement can be arranged. This letter also expresses PVGY's willingness to discuss the student's performance in greater detail with the local school personnel. In some circumstances, PVGY may write directly to the school suggesting that a particular course of studies be made available to a student.

PVGY maintains a middle position between enrichment and acceleration. It is here that PVGY differs from the Johns Hopkins model developed to aid mathematically gifted youth (SMPY). A mathematically gifted student can achieve maximum proficiency through an essentially linear progression through the various mathematical disciplines without the necessity of personal maturity. Verbal giftedness, however, comes to fruition only when it can benefit from the lessons of life, experience, and maturity. Julian C. Stanley underscores the need for maturity, as quoted by Gene Maeroff:

> There may be subjects that these kids aren't ready for, regardless of how smart they are. . . . They are young and self-centered and lack the kind of critical thinking needed in social sciences. Nor do they have the

deep experience for subjects like philosophy; they just haven't lived and loved enough to empathize (*New York Times*, 22 May 1979).

One need not, however, wait until verbally gifted youth have reached young adulthood before offering them an enriched program. At PVGY, we have found verbally gifted youth can be very proficient in rigorous college-level work that stresses mechanics in writing skills and linguistic formulae used in foreign languages, English grammar, and etymology. Introducing verbally gifted students to these aspects of verbal proficiency at a young age prepares a solid foundation on which to build their later experiences.

The differences between SMPY's and PVGY's position toward the school curriculum reflect the differences between mathematical and verbal giftedness. SMPY finds in most schools an adequate number of course offerings in mathematics; however, the courses are paced too slowly for the mathematically gifted student. By contrast, the subject matter and skills offered by PVGY are either lacking at the secondary level (for example, Latin or German), or, as in the case of writing skills and grammar, are introduced too late to stimulate the intellectual development of verbally gifted youth.

The initial years of PVGY have shown that highly qualified junior high school-age students can meet the challenges of a demanding curriculum typically taught at college level, and that a number of teaching techniques are particularly effective with verbally talented youth, if not with all students. Some of the techniques are "thinking out loud" and "varied interaction." With the "thinking out loud" technique, the instructor asks the student to reveal the workings of his/her mind while responding to a question. The student is not permitted to remain silent but must articulate all thoughts or thought fragments associated with a possible answer. If there is momentary silence from the first student questioned, the instructor quickly calls another student to "think out loud" about his/her response to the question. Any number of students may be asked to comment rapidly on a question, thus creating an intense classroom experience. Moderate use of this technique keeps students intellectually stimulated and avoids the situation of students withholding comment unless they believe they have absolutely correct answers.

"Varied interaction" is a technique that has proven particularly effective in the Writing Skills, Latin, and German classes. Verbally gifted youth respond favorably to a rapid shift of instructional style and format. For example, to teach the principle of German relative pronouns, the instructor might begin with a rapid-fire questioning of vocabulary, then shift to a discussion format in which students ask questions about aspects of relative pronouns they did not fully comprehend. (You do not teach the verbally gifted. They tell you what they do not understand and call your attention to these points.) The instructor then might introduce a game format emphasizing a competitive team spirit. With little direction the class divides into small groups to work cooperatively and quietly on worksheets containing exercises about relative pronouns. Then the instructor might switch back again to an individualized rapid-fire vocabulary drill. The shifting of teaching modes continues seemingly at random for a two-hour class, guided only by the instructional objective of the lesson and the learning disposition of the students during the class.

PVGY is essentially an experimental program, but it has struck a responsive chord in the American educational scene. Thus far, reaction around the country as well as internationally has been highly positive. Many educators seem ready to commit themselves to teaching sophisticated verbal skills and to demand higher standards from verbally gifted students.

Implementing Programs for the Verbally Gifted

Experimental programs developed in university settings are sometimes difficult to replicate in public school classrooms. Nevertheless, several efforts to adopt the PVGY model for public schools have proved highly successful. Three key elements are crucial for the success of school-based programs:

1. *Student Selection Criteria*

Criteria must be consistent for all students and appropriate for the program goals. If some students are admitted to the program on the basis of reading test scores while others are selected on the basis of writing samples, the group may be too heterogeneous with respect to the skills needed for the particular course. If the teacher must totally individualize for all activities because of these differences, there is no advantage to a special program. For example, peer review and critique in the writing workshop format would be nonproductive.

2. *Student to Course Match*

The age and ability level of the students must be considered when planning the scope and sequence of the program. A writing seminar for gifted fifth-graders is likely to involve content and skills that are different from one for eighth- and ninth-graders. Also, the more gifted the students the greater the volume of material that will be covered. For example, a highly gifted group may master the equivalent of one year of college German by meeting two hours every week during the school year, while another able but not as highly gifted group might master the equivalent of one semester (or half-year) of college German.

3. *Teacher Qualifications*

Teachers who have thorough mastery of their subject matter and

who know how to motivate and pace their students are essential. The characteristics and training of such master teachers are discussed in the next chapter.

Administrative Arrangements

For some types of verbally gifted students, such as the highly able reader, it is possible to provide an enriched and accelerated program within the regular classroom. At the elementary school level, good teachers know how to use diagnostic testing and prescriptive techniques to form small instructional groups that can handle more challenging work. In the secondary school years, when reading is no longer taught as a separate subject, it may be necessary to provide some advanced seminar classes for the gifted in reading and critical thinking.

For foreign languages and creative writing it would seem sensible to form special classes that meet at least once a week, if not every day, in order to present advanced material at a rapid pace. An alternative would be to offer an intensive short course over a six-week period. If an individual school does not have enough students to form an accelerated foreign language class or a writing skills workshop, systemwide programs may be possible, such as a magnet school, classes on Saturdays or after school hours, or academic summer camps for gifted, sometimes run in cooperation with a local college or university. Some examples of these types of arrangements are described in the following paragraphs.

PVGY programs have been conducted as intensive all-day classes every day for three weeks in a residential camp setting and as once-a-week, two-to-three-hour Saturday classes. There are advantages and disadvantages for both arrangements. The intensive three-week program allows for total immersion in the subject matter without interruption as in the Saturday program. Everything in the environment helps to reinforce the study of the subject; and students have many opportunities to interact with or without an instructor. Saturday classes do not allow much opportunity for students to communicate before the next session. The disadvantages of the intensive course compared to a year-long program are the lack of time for spaced practice of basic skills, no time for incubation (of importance for writing), and little op-

portunity to relate activities in the special program to the regular school program. The ideal situation would be to have an intensive summer program followed by continuing classes once or more a week during the academic year.

In Baltimore City there are special programs in some schools open to enrollments from all over the city. At the elementary level one large school building houses a citywide gifted and talented education program (GATE) for students in kindergarten through the sixth grade. In this program it is possible to group and regroup students across grades by ability and interest for regular classes and for special course offerings. In 1981 a senior teacher at the school developed some minicourses for the upper-grade students on various aspects of writing using the PVGY writing seminars model. In this setting scheduling is flexible, transportation problems are eliminated, and there are many opportunities to relate the writing activities to other aspects of the school curriculum, such as a career education minicourse in journalism.

In 1971 the state of Illinois established nine regional centers, staffed by two professionals, to provide technical assistance to local school systems for education programs for gifted students. In 1977 a pilot project replicated the Johns Hopkins Talent Search model in one service center and expanded it to the entire state in 1978. The School College and Ability Test is used instead of the SAT. In 1979 a course in Latin was offered to gifted seventh-graders in one area resource center. Students were able to complete the equivalent of a first-year high school Latin course in only 26 sessions.

In Delaware, the State Department of Instruction conducts intensive summer courses in two locations in the state. Typically, the programs are for commuters. The courses for the verbally gifted are based on the expository writing model developed by PVGY.

Duke University and Arizona State University have both developed residential summer programs offering a variety of courses in the humanities. For example, Duke offered expository writing and German. At Arizona State courses are offered in expository writing, vocabulary development, and mythological themes throughout the humanities.

Selecting Teachers for Verbally Gifted Youth

In designing programs for verbally gifted youth, there is no more important consideration than the selection, preparation, and development of teachers. Experience at Johns Hopkins has demonstrated that the most successful teachers of verbally gifted youth share a number of characteristics:

- They enjoy children.
- They have a good sense of humor, and especially enjoy playing with language.
- They are personally committed to high standards of education.
- They are eager to teach verbally gifted youth and display their enthusiasm in and out of class.
- They are able to teach their particular discipline to any audience, ranging from kindergartners to graduate students or senior citizens.
- They live their subject in the sense that they do original research in their disciplines or, in the case of writers, regularly publish poems or fiction. They readily share their own work with their students.
- They approach their teaching by integrating the ideas that have historically influenced their discipline.

Teaching styles of the PVGY by faculty at Johns Hopkins range from some very strict to casual. For example, Elizabeth B. Carter, PVGY instructor of etymology and a graduate student in the Johns Hopkins Classics Department, is known to her students and colleagues as one who is firm, purposeful, and methodological in the classroom. She admits she did not have any formal teaching experience with junior high school-age students, gifted or otherwise, prior to PVGY, but her own experience as a gifted child permits her to empathize with the problems gifted children face. She writes:

The problems I faced as a gifted child were boredom; the bewildering sensation of finding myself classified as a "discipline problem" by intimidated teachers and administrators; teasing by classmates; worst of all, a learned habit of laziness, due to never having had to exert myself. I address such problems indirectly in my PVGY classes by showing respect for the student and the subject and by providing the student with an academic challenge. Once the students see that I mean it, they see that they can show respect for the subject, for me, and for each other, without fear of ridicule. All this results in a lot of good-natured, high-spirited hard work. . . . This combination of respect and challenge may be confusing to some who equate challenge with threat. I do not threaten; I encourage students to use their gifts and do more with them than they have had an opportunity to do. . . . Those teachers whom I admired in high school shared this trait of respect for the students and the subject. The best teacher I ever saw in action told me that he always tried to be "the best student in the class." In other words, he prepared as well as he could; he approached the text with questions rather than answers; and he saw himself as a fellow student, working with the students in the class to get to the heart of the matter. I have tried to follow his example.

Kendra Kopelke, a teacher of Writing Skills for PVGY and a part-time college instructor and published poet, possesses a much different teaching style from Elizabeth Carter. She is spontaneous, associative, guided by the immediate interaction of instructor and students or students and students. For Kendra, working in state hospitals during her college years was a significant influence on her classroom teaching style. She writes in aphoristic fashion about these experiences:

Work in state hospitals gave me a certain amount of freedom with myself. The patients demand an incredible amount of honesty and let you know when you are a phoney.

Working with people of various ages—children, teenagers, older people, especially older people—gave me a confidence in what I had to offer.

I had to have dozens of tricks in my hat. When dancing didn't work, I had to move to talking. Most importantly, the momentum, the connection with them had to stay.

I had to be willing to try anything at any time to keep contact. Often times the spontaneous moments were when the real connections between us were made.

While I was with them I learned twice as much as they did. That's also what happens in the classroom. You are always learning.

> And there is a humbling experience here—with my patients then and with my students now. In those moments—searching for contacts—for that which communicates—trying to make my idea become theirs—but their unique idea—mine reformulated, transformed—you are brought face to face with your own weaknesses and self doubts. But by trying and sometimes, in those special moments, succeeding, many, many of your own fears disappear and your confidence emerges.

The styles of teaching described above in two personal statements make it clear that selecting teachers for verbally gifted youth requires more than a checklist of personal and professional qualifications. A comprehensive selection procedure might include recommendations from administrators and peers; an essay written by a candidate describing his/her qualifications for the position; observation of the candidate in his/her regular classroom; and demonstration teaching in a gifted classroom.

Teacher Preparation for Gifted Students

The issue of teacher preparation for the gifted is much debated. A Working Conference on the Gifted and Talented (29-30 April 1980) co-sponsored by the Maryland State Board of Education and the Maryland State Board of Higher Education assessed the teacher preparation in Maryland in these words:

> Some school districts have established qualifications for teachers of gifted and talented students, while others have none. Many teachers are working with these students with no special preparation nor certification. Counties range in educational provisions for gifted and talented students, with some counties offering many services and others none. Undergraduate personnel preparation programs range from meager to somewhat developed.

There is little reason to believe that Maryland is any different from other states. Thus, it is imperative that those concerned with the preparation of teachers for the verbally gifted youth establish training programs, characterized by strong content mastery, pedagogy for the gifted, and various kinds of relating skills. Certification standards for the prospective teacher of the verbally gifted should assure that the candidate is well versed in the history of ideas, the use of the English language, and the aims of an education in the verbal arts.

Continuing Professional Development

A strong inservice program should be instituted to provide for continuing staff development in teaching the verbally gifted. Such programs require coordination among local school systems, state departments of education, and institutions of higher education. Inservice programs might include demonstration centers, workshops, and seminars for teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents. In addition, just as gifted children are often counseled to have older mentors with whom they can discuss topics of mutual interest, teachers of the verbally gifted should seek a mentor with whom they can discuss regularly their subject areas. Such a mentor might come from a local university or be a retired person who has devoted his/her life to the verbal arts.

Long-range Planning and Guidance

Some very gifted students will be ready for college-level courses as early as age 14. Many more students will be ready for more advanced work in one or more subjects by their senior year of high school. Schools must provide flexible alternatives. This requires planning and guidance.

Given the high cost of postsecondary education today, parents are receptive to having their children enter college with advanced standing by having earned a year or more of college credit either by examination or by taking courses on a part-time basis while still in high school. Some students skip grades or telescope their junior and senior high school programs so that they graduate from high school one or two years early. A small number leave high school at the end of the eleventh or even the tenth grade and enter college on a full-time basis without completing the requirements for high school graduation. This last alternative is the most difficult to accomplish in that most colleges place a heavy emphasis on the student's scholastic record in high school and would accept such a student only if he or she had unusually high scores on both achievement and aptitude tests.

Credit by Examination

Many colleges give credit for previous course work and place students in advanced sections on the basis of examinations, of which the most widely used is the Advanced Placement program (AP) administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). There are 19 AP examinations in 13 different subject areas (there is more than one level of

examination in some subjects such as mathematics). The examinations are given in May of each year.

Many high schools offer one or more rigorous courses directed toward passing the AP exams. What students and teachers do not always understand is that a student need not be enrolled in an official AP course to qualify to take the exams. A bright student in a regular senior English or French class could study independently outside of class to pass the AP test. Indeed, ETS sells course guides and sample practice test items. Some colleges will give three or four college credits for a high score on the AP exam, all for an investment of under $50 for the course guide and examination fee.

Some high schools offer an AP course to only those students who have taken prerequisite courses in the same subject; or the course is restricted to seniors. Many bright ninth- and tenth-graders should be allowed access to these advanced courses rather than taking basic courses offered in their grade.

College Courses

Over the past decade many colleges and junior colleges have initiated programs in which high school students can take college courses for credit on weekends, at night, or in the summers while still enrolled in high school. Although most of these programs like High School Scholars at Johns Hopkins University are targeted towards end-of-the-year high school juniors, they do make exceptions for younger students who can demonstrate their readiness for college work. In most instances the high school students register for regular courses and are mixed with the older college students. Interestingly, they are rarely recognized as being younger, and typically earn more As and Bs in the courses than do the regular students.

If colleges or junior colleges are located close to high schools, it is often possible to have special courses scheduled at the college in the early morning or late afternoon for the high school students. Some colleges are willing to offer courses for credit at the high school if there are enough students to form a class, since it is more efficient to transport one teacher than 20 students.

If there are no colleges within commuting distance, it is possible to

arrange for high school students to take college courses by correspondence. The Manhattan High School in Manhattan, Kansas, has developed an excellent correspondence program with Kansas State University. One teacher supervises a whole classroom of students who are taking one or more courses. There may be 10 or more different courses being studied by students in one class in a given semester. The classroom teacher helps the students keep records of their assignments and finds experts in the subject to help a student who is having difficulties with the correspondence material.

Some high schools will give credit towards high school graduation for courses taken at a college. For example, a student might take English composition and English literature at a college at the end of the junior year and substitute that course for senior-year English in the high school. Decisions about these matters are often made by individual school principals depending on state and local policy.

Early Graduation

Credit by examination for college courses taken while in high school can be used to accelerate and enrich a student's program in one particular subject of interest without requiring the student to leave his/her age peers or move ahead in all subjects. Some students, however, are so gifted in all the academic areas that they should be considered for a double promotion in elementary and junior high school or for early graduation from high school.

Schools differ in their policies concerning early graduation. Some high schools grant a diploma to students who leave at the end of eleventh grade after they have successfully completed a year of college work. Sometimes students are allowed to take both the junior and senior years of English in their junior year and obtain the necessary Carnegie units for graduation a year early. Some high schools are able to offer many advanced courses through cooperative arrangements with nearby colleges.

A decision to graduate early is one that must be based on careful assessment of all the possible options and on the nature of the individual student. Some academically gifted youth are independent and socially aggressive and mix well with older students. Some students can pace

their own course of study and earn credit by examination while others need the pressure of regular class meetings and written assignments. Sometimes an AP literature course in high school taught by a brilliant teacher is more challenging than a college course taught by a mediocre instructor. Thus, it is impossible to prescribe a simple pat formula for all gifted youth.

Career Guidance for the Verbally Gifted

People often associate careers in law, politics, and journalism with verbal ability; and the stereotypes of the eloquent orator or persuasive writer come to mind. Verbal abilities, however, are useful if not invaluable in a wide range of occupations. From middle management to the top rungs of commercial and industrial leadership, the ability to communicate clearly and concisely and to grasp the meanings of the written and spoken words of others is an essential ingredient for success. Verbal reasoning ability is essential in the study of the social sciences, the biological sciences, and the physical sciences. It is required for educators, for clergy, and for others in the helping professions. Indeed, the nature of work in the U.S. has changed gradually over the past 100 years so that fewer and fewer jobs deal with producing goods and more and more deal with the communication of ideas and the information services.

The verbally gifted can realistically aspire to careers that require long years of formal academic preparation. Perhaps the most interesting way to learn about careers in depth is to have an internship with a professional in that career field. Or career workshops, while less intensive than internships, offer the advantage of exposure to many careers in a short time. Often these workshops can be conducted in one day. Panelists describe a typical day's work, discuss how they chose their career and prepared for it, and then answer student questions. For the verbally gifted, there might be panels organized around such career fields as journalism, technical writing in science and medicine, advertising, international banking and trade, sociology, law and politics, the media, and education. Such opportunities to interact with adults allow students to see how verbal ability is central to success in many careers.

Conclusion

This fastback calls for a commitment to excellence in the verbal arts by those who work with verbally gifted youth. To write well, to communicate well orally, is to use language in a way that values clarity, reason, and precision. If these values are neglected, especially among our most talented youth, a way of life is surely endangered.

To insure excellence in the education of verbally gifted youth requires that these youth be identified at an early age, that appropriate instructional and counseling programs be provided for their continued development, and that teachers be selected and prepared who will challenge them.

The ideas and model programs described in this fastback are a beginning. It remains for educators across the country to nurture our verbally talented youth, for they truly are a national treasure.

Appendix A: Achievement Tests

The verbal sections of the following commercially available achievement tests may be used as one measure for identifying verbally gifted children and youth.

1. Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)
2. California Achievement Test (CAT)
3. Stanford Achievement Test
4. SRA Assessment Survey
5. Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)
6. California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS)
7. ERB Comprehensive Testing Program (CTP)
8. Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT)
9. Peabody Individual Achievement Test (PIAT)
10. STS Educational Development Series
11. Sequential Tests of Educational Progress (STEP)
12. Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT)

Appendix B:
Talent Search Application Addresses

Maryland
William C. George or Linda Barnett
Office of Talent Identification and Development
104 Merryman Hall
The Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore, MD 21218

Delaware
Gary Houpt
State Supervisors
State Board of Education
Townsend Building
Federal Street at Loockermann Street
Dover, DE 19901

Pennsylvania
Richard L. Croll
Dean of Instruction
Community College of Allegheny County
West Mifflin, PA 15122

New Jersey
Judith Burr
Coordinator of State Projects
Gifted Education
Educational Improvement Center
207 Delsea Drive
R.D. 4, Box 209
Sewell, NJ 08080

Duke University (North Carolina)
Robert Sawyer
Talent Identification Program
06 West Duke Building
Duke University
Durham, NC 27708

Arizona
Sanford J. Cohn, Director
Project for the Study of Academic Precocity (PSAP)
Department of Special Education
Arizona State University
Tempe, AZ 85281

Illinois
Wilma Lund, Coordinator of Gifted Programs
Illinois Office of Education
100 N. 1st Street
Springfield, IL 62777

Joyce Van Tassel
Region 1—South
Area Service Center Gifted
Matteson School District
21244 Illinois Street
Matteson, IL 60443

Minnesota
Lorraine Hertz
Gifted Education Coordinator
Minnesota Department of Education
641 Capitol Square
St. Paul, MN 55101

Wisconsin
(Latin and Russian)

Richard deGrood
Eau Claire Area Association for High Potential Children
Rte 1
1912 Statz Avenue
Eau Claire, WI 54701

Appendix C:
Selected Tests for Identifying Verbal Talent by Age Group

	Grade												
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Verbal Aptitude	Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT)				School & College Ability Test (SCAT)			School & College Ability Test (SCAT)					
					Academic Promise Test (APT)			Differential Aptitude Test (DAT)					
								Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT)					
								Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)					
Foreign Language Aptitude				Modern Language Aptitude Test Elementary (MLAT-ED)				Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery			Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT)		
Creativity	Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking for grades K-12												

Appendix D: Teacher Checklist for Creative Writing

Student's Name _____ Age _____ Sex _____ Grade _____

Evaluator's Name _____ Position _____ Date _____

Criteria		Average or Below	Above Average	Superior for Age Grade	Almost Professional Quality	Truly Rare Talent
I. Structure (Clarity, Organization)						
II. Mechanics:	A. Fluency and Vocabulary					
	B. Grammar, Spelling, Sentence Structure					
III. Organization:	A. Style					
	B. Content					
IV. Paragraph Development:	A. Narration					
	B. Description					
	C. Exposition					
	D. Argument					
V. Literary Form:	A. Essay					
	B. Short Story					
	C. Poem					
	D. Play					
	E. Other (Specify)					
	Column Total					
	Weight	0	1	2	3	4
	Weighted Total					
					Grand Total Weighted	

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